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ABSTRACT

A study examined placement as a key indicator of commitment to occupational preparation in secondary education. The study focuses on the different amounts and types of support received for placement services in different types of schools, the effect of type of school (rural, urban, or suburban) on the placement services available, and the personal priority of vocational teachers to place graduates in training-related jobs. The study data were collected in the spring and fall of 1986 as part of a systematic database secured through a national sample of public secondary schools and classrooms within them. Ten different instruments were used to collect data on a nationwide random sample of 120 schools, with at least 20 teachers and 4 vocational programs observed in each school. Ninety percent of the vocational teachers supported placement of students (versus 68 percent of the academic teachers). The greatest commitment to student placement was found in area vocational schools. Almost three-fourths of the teachers in vocational high schools indicated that their schools helped students look for summer jobs. Placement was most available in urban schools and least available in rural schools. Although the vocational teachers were committed to placing students in jobs related to their training, they considered providing students with job search skills more important than providing actual job placement services. Neither the vocational nor comprehensive high school teachers expressed much commitment to the idea of placing students in non-training-related jobs. (MN)

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EMPHASES ON PLACEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOL JOB-RELATED TRAINING PROGRAMS

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Vocational education in traditional comprehensive high schools is in a state of flux. The recent educational reform movement, with its emphasis on academic excellence, has reduced the time available for occupational courses in some school settings. Placement services, historically a key component of school commitment to job-related training, could suffer as a result of these back-to-the-basics reforms.

Should secondary schools try to prepare students for jobs? Some people don't think so. Secretary of Education William Bennett at the 1986 American Vocational Association national convention suggested that vocational educators might "decide that job specific training is best suited for the postsecondary level." This sentiment was echoed by the Commission on the Future of the South. Placement services are a logical "next step" for youth who graduate from occupationally specific skill-development courses. These services should help ease the transition between school and work for youth who have a need to bridge that gap soon after high school graduation. Without assistance, these students are often left to flounder as they struggle to create their own paths to the marketplace.

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[1] The authors are a research specialist and associate director, respectively, at the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University. Staff on the project were James Weber, Director; Nancy Puleo; Paula Kurth; and Marta Fisch. This paper was presented at the American Vocational Education Research Association research paper session at the AVA Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, December 8, 1987.

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Placement, as an indicator of success for vocational education programs, is being questioned in the minds of some secondary school leaders. Does this mean that students will no longer have the option of occupational preparation at the secondary level? For schools offering occupational training, what placement services should be available? Should these services be institutionalized or should help finding a job be left to the discretion of individual teachers? These questions and others must be answered by any thoughtful school administrator at the secondary level.

Objectives

This study examines placement as a key indicator of commitment to occupational preparation in secondary education. The logic is simple: if occupational preparation is offered in a school, should school staff help high school graduates find related jobs? This study has the following three objectives:

1. To determine the support received for placement services by type of school.
2. To determine if the location of the school (rural, urban, or suburban) makes any difference in placement services available.
3. To describe the personal priority of vocational teachers to place graduates in training-related jobs.

Background

The link between vocational education and the workplace has a long tradition in legislation. The Vocational Education Act of 1963, P. L. 88-210, specifically defined the program to "fit individuals for gainful employment as semiskilled or skilled workers or technicians." The preparation of skilled workers for

employment continues as a goal of vocational educators today: The Carl D. Perkins Vocational education Act, P. L. 980524, asks state boards to "determine how best to improve student skill levels in light of the state's occupational and skill requirements." The acid test for determining program success in many states has been the placement of students in occupations related to their training. This criterion has played a prominent role in vocational program reimbursement strategies for such widely divergent states as Ohio and Mississippi.

The public wants their children to receive a work-relevant education. When asked what they considered the chief reasons why people want their children to get an education, Americans tend to mention job- and finance-related reasons first. For example, about one-third (34%) of the Gallop Poll respondents cited job opportunities, 8 percent said to get a better-paying job, 4 percent said to obtain specialized training, and 9 percent said to achieve financial security (Gallup 1986). Seventy-seven percent of the parents contacted for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's third annual education profile rated their children's education as excellent or good, and they gave similarly high marks to teachers. But only 42 percent said schools prepare students adequately for jobs after graduation (Metropolitan Life Company 1987).

Preparing secondary school youth for jobs is difficult in many settings. Schools may lack sufficient size to offer very many specialized classes. Equipment is expensive, and students need access to realistic training experiences. Bottoms and Copa (1983) claim intensive, occupationally specific programs are

available for only one-fifth of the student population in secondary schools. Intensive course preparation appears to be necessary for training-related placement. Campbell and Basinger (1985) found program completers to possess a labor market advantage when they accepted employment in training-related jobs following high school graduation. Lewis (1983) reported that men in the trade and industry program and women in the business program were more likely than persons in other programs to obtain training-related jobs. The economic benefits of occupational education are 20 percent more compared to non-occupational training if the job is training related, according to Bishop (1986).

In studies of factors related to placement of secondary school vocational education students, McKinney et al. (1981) found schools tended to have higher rates of placement when job placement rates were used as program evaluation criterion and when teachers maintain frequent contact with business and industry representatives. Mertens and Gardner (1983) found training-related placement to be enhanced when teachers assisted their students in finding jobs. If placement is viewed as high priority by teachers and others in the school, then students are more likely to be successful in finding training-related jobs.

Should placement in a job related to training be an objective for vocational education? Should placement be both an institutional and an individual priority? The academic excellence movement (Adler, 1982; National Academy of Sciences, 1984; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) has influenced schools to teach a core curriculum of competencies that

are the same for all students. Of necessity, this approach places priority on academic proficiency instead of skill training. This approach often ignores the enormous variation among students in the way they learn. The National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education (n.d.) expressed concern over curriculum requirements. "States should not mandate curriculum requirements," according to the Commission, "that restrict students' opportunities to participate in vocational education experiences." The best schools, according to Swanson (1986), are the ones which are multidimensional.

The role of placement in the secondary school is an issue because even the existence of occupationally specific training at the secondary level presents a problem for some. Wilms (1987) says "vocational education does not belong in our public schools." He believes it is futile to link the supply of entry-level workers to employers' changing demands. Siberman (n.d.) takes issue with this claim. He says the portrait of a volatile labor market has been greatly overdrawn. The large core of entry-level jobs has not changed very much and is not likely to disappear in the near future. This ongoing debate is one reason that the upcoming National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE) will be taking a look at the future of occupational training and the possibility of linking funding strategies to performance standards based on job placement.

Research Method Used

The survey data used in this paper were collected in he spring and fall of 1986 as part of a systematic database secured via a national sample of public secondary schools and classrooms within those schools.[2] Descriptive statistics (e.g., means and proportions) are used to describe the available data related to each of the designated objectives. A total of ten different instruments were used to collect data for the study. Information from the teacher's questionnaire is presented in this paper.

The nationwide sample of 120 schools and related classrooms were chosen in an unbiased (random) manner using a 3-stage sampling process. First, 3 states were randomly chosen in each of the 8 regions of the country identified by the Center on Education Statistics. Next, stratified random samples of 4, 5, or 6 schools were identified in each selected state. Finally, specific respondents and respondent groups within each school were identified. The principal was selected with certainty. Up to 20 teachers were randomly selected for observation, interviews, and observation activities. At least four vocational programs were observed in each school. Preference was given to the more occupationally orientated vocational programs when observing the programs.

The types of high schools in the sample are displayed in table 1. There were three times as many comprehensive high

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[2]These data were collected and are being analyzed under the direction of Dr. James Weber. The results presented in this paper are preliminary and should be considered tentative pending further analysis.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE SAMPLE
BY LOCATION AND TYPE OF SCHOOL

Type of High School	Location			Total
	Rural	Urban	Suburban	
Comprehensive	24	20	19	63
Area	16	16	6	38
Vocational	3	8	8	19
Total	43	44	33	120

schools as vocational high schools in the sample. Only 3, of the specialized vocational schools were located in rural areas. Area high schools were almost three times as likely to be located in rural or urban areas as in suburban areas. Over half of the 120 schools in this sample were comprehensive high schools.

The tables in this paper are based on 1,305 responses from vocational teachers in 120 high schools. Non-vocational teachers were invited to skip these items on placement in the teachers questionnaire. The information in tables 2 through 6 is based on responses from all 1,305 teachers. Approximately 17 percent of the teachers did not respond to the items on vocational program goals, tables 5 and 6. Many more of the vocational teachers, almost 50 percent, choose not to respond to the questions on placement services, tables 3 and 4.

Results of the Study

As indicated in table 2, the institutional commitment to placement of students on the job was influenced by the type of school. Ninety percent of the teachers in vocational schools supported placement of students, either vocational or non-vocational. This was in contrast to vocational teachers from comprehensive high schools who supported institutional placement of students at a 68 percent level. The information in table 2 tends to support the hypothesis that the greater the vocational instruction at the school, the greater the likelihood of school-sponsored job placement services. This likelihood was greatest for vocational students receiving instruction in area schools.

TABLE 2

PROPORTION OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS INDICATING THE AVAILABILITY OF A SCHOOL-SPONSORED JOB PLACEMENT SERVICE BY TYPE OF SCHOOL

Type of School	Number of Teachers Responding	A School-Sponsored Job Placement Service			
		Is Available		Is Not Available	Total
		To All Students	To Vocational Students		
Comprehensive	472	.267	.415	.318	.432
Area	262	.248	.573	.179	.240
Vocational	359	.415	.493	.092	.328
TOTAL	1,093	.311	.479	.210	1.0

Placement services were examined by location of the teachers in urban, suburban or rural schools. As noted in table 3, services were perceived to be greater in urban settings, followed by suburban settings, and least available in rural schools. Finding jobs for students who are about to graduate was a more frequent placement service than placement for coop students or finding summer jobs in the rural or suburban areas. Teachers in rural schools viewed summer jobs as important as jobs for graduates. Using work stations for career exploration activities was not a frequent placement activity in any of the locations. Less than 5 percent of the teachers indicated it was occurring with any regularity.

Placement services are occurring with greater frequency in vocational high schools than any other type of setting according to vocational teachers. Table 4 shows almost three-fourths of the teachers in vocational high schools indicated their schools helped students look for summer jobs. Placement services were less prevalent in comprehensive high schools compared to area high schools or vocational high schools.

The personal priority of vocational teachers for placing graduates in training-related jobs was examined in a question asking about program goals. Tables 5 and 6 display their responses as rank order means for each goal. As noted in both tables, there were very few differences by type of high school or by location with one exception. Teachers in comprehensive high schools exhibited a lower ranking for placing students in jobs related to their training when they leave high school than this

TABLE 3

PROPORTION OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS INDICATING PLACEMENT SERVICES PROVIDED BY LOCATION

Placement Services	All Settings	Location of Teachers		
		Rural	Urban	Suburban
	N=1,305	N=403	N=533	N=369
Posting current job and placement information	.527	.407	.621	.523
Finding summer jobs for students	.482	.350	.591	.469
Finding part-time non-Coop jobs for students	.449	.320	.555	.436
Finding part-time Coop jobs for students	.467	.390	.527	.463
Finding jobs for students who are about to graduate	.493	.380	.587	.480
Finding work stations in the community for students to engage in career exploration activities	.046	.052	.032	.060

TABLE 4

PROPORTION OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS INDICATING PLACEMENT SERVICES PROVIDED BY TYPE OF SCHOOL

Placement Services	Comprehensive High School Teachers N=464	Area High School Teachers N=581	Vocational High School Teachers N=260	All Teachers N=1,305
Posting current job and placement information	.375	.573	.696	.527
Finding summer jobs for students	.343	.489	.715	.482
Finding part-time Non-Coop jobs for students	.304	.480	.638	.449
Finding part-time Coop jobs for students	.360	.449	.585	.467
Finding jobs for students who are about to graduate	.300	.554	.700	.493
Finding work stations in the community for students to engage in career exploration activities	.073	.036	.019	.046

TABLE 5

MEAN RANK ORDER OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS'

PROGRAM GOALS BY TYPE OF SCHOOL

N=1,305

Vocational Program Goals	Average Rank Order					
	Comprehensive High School		Area High School		Vocational High School	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
To provide students with competencies to secure jobs	1	(2.5)	1	(2.5)	1	(2.4)
To help students develop a strong work ethic	2	(3.0)	2	(3.0)	2	(2.9)
To place students in jobs related to their training when they leave high school	6	(4.6)	3	(3.1)	2	(2.9)
To enhance student awareness of jobs	3	(3.8)	4	(4.2)	4	(4.2)
To provide exploration of occupational areas	4	(4.3)	5	(5.0)	6	(5.3)
To reinforce students' basic skills	5	(4.5)	6	(5.1)	5	(4.8)
To promote access and equity for students	7	(6.2)	7	(6.4)	7	(6.5)
To place students in jobs regardless of their training relatedness when they leave high school	8	(6.9)	7	(6.4)	8	(6.7)

NOTE: The most important goal was ranked as "1", the second most important as "2", and so forth.

TABLE 6

MEAN RANK ORDER OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS'

PROGRAM GOALS BY LOCATION

N=1,305

Vocational Program Goals	Average Rank Order					
	Rural		Urban		Suburban	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
To provide students with competencies to secure jobs	1	(2.4)	1	(2.4)	1	(2.5)
To help students develop a strong work ethic	2	(3.0)	2	(3.1)	2	(3.0)
To place students in jobs related to their training when they leave high school	3	(3.7)	3	(3.3)	2	(3.5)
To enhance student awareness of jobs	4	(4.0)	4	(4.1)	4	(4.1)
To provide exploration of occupational areas	5	(4.8)	5	(4.9)	5	(4.7)
To reinforce students' basic skills	5	(4.8)	6	(5.0)	5	(4.7)
To promote access and equity for students	7	(6.4)	7	(6.4)	7	(6.3)
To place students in jobs regardless of their training relatedness when they leave high school	8	(6.6)	8	(6.5)	8	(6.7)

NOTE: The most important goal was ranked as "1", the second most important as "2", and so forth.

teachers in area high schools and vocational high schools. Interestingly, very low levels of commitment were noted by teachers in any type of high school or setting for placing students in jobs regardless of their training relatedness. This seems to suggest a lack of desire to view schools as a placement office for all students.

Providing students with competencies to secure jobs, e.g., developing interviewing skills, and helping students develop a work ethic ranked higher than placement in a training-related job for teachers responding to this survey. Student awareness of jobs and job exploration activities were rated as more important by teachers from comprehensive schools compared to teachers from area or vocational schools.

Findings

1. A higher percentage of specialized vocational high schools offer a school-sponsored job placement service to their students than area schools or comprehensive high schools.

2. Comprehensive high schools are less likely to offer a placement service than area or vocational high schools.

3. Urban high schools, followed by suburban high schools are more likely to provide placement services than rural high schools.

4. Rural high schools lag in placement services.

5. Vocational teachers are committed to placing students in training-related jobs, however:

    a. providing students with competencies to secure employment, such as, interviewing skills, and helping students develop a work ethic were ranked higher than placement in a training-related job.

    b. Very Little commitment existed to placing students in jobs regardless of their training relatedness.

6. Vocational teachers in vocational high schools and area schools exhibited greater commitment to training-related placement than vocational teachers in comprehensive high schools.

Summary

This paper has examined the role of the secondary school as a vehicle for offering placement services to high school students. It appears that the vocational high schools and to a lesser extent the area high schools are making more of a commitment to placing their students in training-related jobs than the comprehensive high schools. This commitment to training-related placement by vocational high schools in urban settings should make a positive contribution to the successful transition of vocational students into the work place.

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